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Indonesia attacks overseas activists, journalists
By Jeremy Wagstaff
JAKARTA, Jan 20 (Reuter) - Indonesia, its record on human rights under international scrutiny, blamed overseas activists and journalists on Thursday for trying to damage the country's image abroad.

Foreign Minister Ali Alatas, facing a February deadline over U.S. trading privileges and U.N. scrutiny over human rights, said a small group of East Timorese exiles, activists and journalists in the West were "distorting the perception of some good people who do not even know where Indonesia is''.

"There is a small but vocal group in the world who band together in an organised campaign against Indonesia, trying to discredit us and blacken our name,'' he told a news conference.

Alatas was speaking during the visit to Indonesia of two envoys of U.N. Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali as part of U.N.-brokered efforts to end an 18-year-old conflict over the former Portuguese colony of East Timor.

The United Nations still recognises Portugal as the Indonesian-held territory's administering authority.

Efforts under President Suharto to pursue a greater global role for Indonesia have been hampered by attacks on its rights record, including its labour policies and role in East Timor.

Indonesia this month said it was pushing for a non-permanent seat on the U.N. Security Council to replace Pakistan in 1995. It currently chairs the Non-Aligned Movement and the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation forum.

Indonesia on Thursday sent a report on labour practices to Washington, which has threatened to cut $650 million worth of tariff-free exports unless workers' rights are improved.

Washington last year suspended military aid because of Indonesia's role in East Timor, where troops shot dead up to 180 mourners in a cemetery in the capital, Dili, in November 1991..

Alatas blamed these moves on distortions created by foreign detractors.

Jailed Timorese leader Xanana Gusmao smuggled out tapes, letters and statements during a family visit to his cell in Jakarta in late December. Indonesia suspended further visits after the material was widely publicised abroad.

"Unfortunately (such moves) have distorted the perception in various governments and parliaments in the West. This is our problem. But it also blurs the honest appraisal of certain things that need to be improved,'' Alatas said.

He said the visit of U.N. envoys Francesc Vendrell and Tamrat Samuel, who arrived in Dili on Thursday, was part of a process of resolving the conflict over East Timor in talks with Portugal and Timorese not linked to the territory's guerrilla movement.

Indonesia next month faces a grilling at the U.N. Human Rights Commission in Geneva where, human rights activists say, delegates will submit five reports on Indonesia's record.
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Meanwhile, a report out of Lisbon Thursday said the local press published the transcript of a tape alleged of Gusmao speaking in Portugese, reaffirming that the armed struggle for independence in East Timor should continue.

The tape was allegedly smuggled out to the British Broadcasting Corporation from Gusmao's cell.

In it, Gusmao recognized the military weakness of the pro-independence movement, but called on all clandestine leaders in East Timor to grasp the fact that "so long as a single guerilla fighter lives, the fires of freedom will continue to burn."

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